



Female Rosella at entrance to nesting hollow.

Photo, by M. S. R. Sharland.

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Arrangements were made for the inclusion in this part of a colour plate of the New Zealand Paradise Duck, to accompany which Dr. W. R. B. Oliver forwarded a paper. A last-minute discovery that no specimen of the bird was available for the artist to work from has resulted in no colour plate being included in this issue. Dr. Oliver's paper, with plate, will appear later.

The Rosella Parrot

By M. S. R. SHARLAND, Sydney, New South Wales

The Rosella Parrot (*Platycercus eximius*) is one of the commonest, but not always the most obtrusive bird of the lightly-timbered lands and open forests of the eastern States of Australia and Tasmania. In captivity, where it is seen so frequently, its showy plumage would indicate it to be a conspicuous object of the Australian bush, yet all who know it in the field must appreciate how well its colours blend with its natural environment among the eucalypt foliage of varying shades of reds and greens. Its colours, although prominent in a cage, serve almost to obliterate the wearer when it is feeding in the trees, a fact which challenges a theory, often expounded, that bright female birds must conceal themselves during the incubation period lest their brightness disclose the situation of the nest.

The Rosella, one imagines, would have been afforded ample security had it attained to the art of nest-building instead of breeding in the dark hollows of stems and spouts, and selected for a nesting position the higher foliage of the gums, where its plumage would be sufficient to conceal it. That, indeed, might well apply to all the Parrots which possess a naturally-protective plumage. As it is, the supposed security of nesting hollows often proves a delusion, for most are easily seen by those in search of young birds or eggs and, in consequence, we find that for some miles around the larger cities and country towns Rosella nesting country is

invaded each year by amateur and professional bird-catchers, who extract young birds from the holes, snare the adults, and dispose of them to bird shops, markets and to suburban dwellers whose interest in aviculture is ordinarily confined to keeping a few Canaries and unfortunate Finches in a small cage on the back verandah, or a talking Parrot cramped in diminutive quarters in a yard.

As adult Rosellas rarely learn to talk or whistle as well as those which are caught young, there is not the same amount of trade in them as in nestlings, and for the most part they are permitted to remain to carry on the race and, incidentally, provide more returns for the invaders in following years. But I have it on the authority of one who is engaged in the trade that in order to get a better price in the city markets adult Rosellas are sometimes partially plucked to make them resemble fledglings, and the average buyer, knowing little about birds, is deceived. The cruelty of such a practice—apart from the deception of a customer—warrants an investigation into the whole question of trading in birds, protected or otherwise, and, possibly, the total prohibition of the sale of any indigenous bird would not be unjustified.

Most of the nesting trees of the Rosella in certain districts near Sydney are known to bird-catchers, and it is not uncommon to see in early summer, boys and men carrying boxes and bags through the paddocks in search of young birds. To them any bird likely to return a few pence is fair game, and the Kookaburra (*Dacelo gigas*) shares the fate of the Rosella in the loss of its fledglings. One has only to visit the bird section of the markets in the season to see how profitable their excursions prove to be.

The Rosella bears a strong attachment to a nesting area, and in addition to living in one locality throughout the year, generally uses the same hollow season after season. On the shale country between Parramatta and the Blue Mountains, to the west of Sydney, Rosellas are fairly numerous, and in consequence of the destruction of much of the natural timber which constitutes their nesting quarters, they have taken to breeding in low stumps and holes in living trees, sometimes within a few feet of the ground. To obtain the photograph which is reproduced with these notes, it was not necessary to elevate the tripod or camera from the ground, for the entrance to the large hollow was only three feet six inches from a sloping bank of a creek, and the nest could be seen without straining the eyes into the darkness. Furthermore, the bird, when sitting, was in sunlight for part of the day.

A number of species of birds are distinguished by a patch of some conspicuous colour on the covert feathers of the tail, sometimes referred to as the "rump." The purpose of

that feature may be to serve as a warning to others of their kind, as the white tail of the rabbit when displayed, in a rush to safety, is regarded as a danger signal to its tribe. From an observer's point of view, such a feature is often a recognition mark. When a bird is flying directly away from the observer so that he sees only the edges of the wings and the posterior end, identification at the moment is not always simple, and may be possible only when the creature swerves and reveals its head or body markings. But if he catches sight of a mark on the rump he may recognize at once a familiar species. A whitish mark on the tail coverts of the Swamp Hawk (*Circus approximans*) is a good identification feature. Another is the bright green rump of the Rosella, which is often the most prominent feature about the bird as it darts out of a tree and flies away on the opposite side as the observer is approaching. Often in the bushlands, particularly when traversing such areas by train or car, I have noticed this bright mark, when birds were disturbed, moving against the darker verdure of trees in the background before I actually saw the outline of the birds, but knew at once that they were Rosellas.

When flying across the line of vision, of course, there is no mistaking one of these handsome Parrots, with its red head and multi-coloured plumage, the males in the breeding season being particularly well dressed. The females, generally speaking, are slightly less brilliant.

Cockatiels in South-western Australia, etc.—I noted Mr. Sedgwick's remarks re Cockatiels (*Leptolophus hollandicus*) in *The Emu*, vol. xxxv, pt. 3, also Major H. M. Whittell's note in last issue. On November 11, 1934, Cockatiels were reported to me by a fellow-member in the Toodjay district, and on December 10, 1934, I saw seven birds of the species at Seabrook, near Northam, for the first time. Further odd birds were seen during January, 1935, and then they seem to have disappeared as I have seen or heard nothing of them since. Possibly the dry conditions that have been and still are existing in the interior of the State caused the birds to come further south than is usual for them.

I observed the Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus axillaris*) for the first time in this district in July, 1934, one bird only being noted throughout the year. The following March I noted two birds, which proved to be a pair. They remained in the locality and nested in a eucalypt amongst scrub situated about a mile from the homestead. Three young were reared and they remained in the district until December, when they and the parent birds disappeared.—L. H. C. JENKINS, Northam, W.A., 26/5/36.